Six Solvent Risk Control Measures

Following the death of a young worker who was exposed to a volatile solvent, WorkCover NSW in Australia has issued a hazard alert, with six recommended risk control measures.

WorkCover Authority of New South Wales (WorkCover NSW) in Australia has issued a safety alert after a young worker died while using a volatile solvent to clean the inside of a boat's hull.

Solvent vapors were both inhaled and absorbed through the worker's skin, causing a loss of consciousness and death from an irregular heartbeat.

The boat had no ventilation to remove the vapors and the worker was not using respiratory PPE or gloves.

WorkCover NSW recommends the following six risk control methods for solvents:

1. Whenever possible, substitute solvent-based cleaners with water-based ones.
2. Ensure there is adequate ventilation to keep solvent vapors below exposure limits set out in regulations.
3. Supervisors need to read safety data sheets (SDSs) to determine what PPE is necessary and what engineering controls are appropriate to protect workers.
4. Train workers on how to use PPE and ensure they are also trained on other hazards associated with the use of volatile solvents and thinners.
5. For areas that are enclosed or partially enclosed, a worker should stand outside the area and use a long-handled mop to clean the confined area.
6. Ensure there are no ignition sources when using solvents in enclosed or partially enclosed areas such as tanks, as there is potential for creating a hazardous atmosphere.

Assign this Solvent Safety Basics SafetyTalk to your workers to help them understand some of the risks associated with solvents.

Chemical labels are changing in the US, and eventually in Canada to conform with Global Harmonization Standard (GHS) requirements. Learn more about what how these changes will impact the workplace.